

# Office of Economic Opportunity

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## Objective

As outlined in MCA 90-1-112 the purpose of this office is to **provide a vision and a direction through the development of strategies and initiatives to ensure that the state's role in expanding the economy takes place in an orderly and effective manner.**

- 1) Transition from reactive to a proactive in the way we attract, retain and grow businesses in this state.
- 2) Build the infrastructure that will make Montana a more competitive and attractive place to conduct business.

## Staff

Chief Business Officer Dave Gibson leads the Office. The staffing of the Office began with Dave's hiring in August and was completed by November 2001. The entire team is listed below:

Dave Gibson	Chief Business Officer
Jason Hanson	Technology and Infrastructure
Mark Lindberg	Energy and Agriculture
Quinn Ness	Business Retention and Recruitment
Desiree Taggart	Workforce Development
Lynette Brown	Office Manager

## Advisory Council

In January 2002, Governor Judy Martz formed an Advisory Council to provide direction and oversight to the Office of Economic Opportunity. The Council first convened in February 2002 and meets approximately once a month in various locations around the state. The Economic Development Advisory Council is made up of the following members:

Turner Askew	President, Turner Askew and Associates, Whitefish
Jerry Driscoll	Executive Secretary, AFL-CIO, Helena
Dave Kasten	Representative, HD 99, Rancher, Brockway
Scott Mendenhall	Executive Director, Jefferson Local Development Corp., Whitehall
Sharron Quisenberry	Dean, College of Agriculture, MSU-Bozeman
Tom Scott	Chairman, First Interstate BancSystem, Billings
Will Weaver	Consultant & Former Dean, Great Falls College of Technology, Great Falls

## Office Accomplishments

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### Business Climate

Improvement in the overall business climate in Montana is perhaps the most critical foundation issue for restoring economic health to our economy. Major accomplishments include...

- Conducted more than 250 retention visits to Montana businesses in the past 9 months
- Sponsor of Montana seed & venture capital forum in August
- Created an *Access to Capital Task Force* to develop ways to make capital more accessible to Montana Businesses including representatives from investment banking, venture capital, local community financing, Board of Investments, commercial banking and Dept. of Commerce
- Co-leading (with Director of Revenue) development and promotion of significant tax-reform proposal for Montana
- Representing Montana with the Western Area Power Administration's regional transmission constraints study
- Member of MDT Tran-Plan 21 steering committee to insure economic development objectives are fully integrated into transportation strategy
- Sponsoring/co-sponsoring 3 grants totaling \$2 million to support economic development and capacity building – grants should be awarded later this year

### Business Recruitment

As we have worked hard to develop the business recruitment initiative and develop key relationships, we have also worked to capitalize on available opportunities. To date we have...

- Active involvement in 27 different business recruitment projects. 25 projects involving 2,200 new Montana jobs are active.
- Implemented a thorough and detailed due-diligence process to evaluate companies and projects seeking state assistance at the beginning of a project and to assist communities in evaluating risk.
- Attended 3 promotional events with community and private sector partners to promote Montana as a business location.
  - Core-Net, Salt Lake City – large companies, global real-estate
  - IT-Open, Williston – large & small IT companies
  - Ag-Open, Williston – large & small ag. companies
  - *Counties Represented: Yellowstone, Cascade, Flathead, Silver Bow, Valley, Daniels, Sheridan, Richland, McCone, Dawson, Roosevelt, Garfield, Rosebud, Treasure, Powder River, Carter, Fallon, Custer, Prairie, Wibaux*
- Participated in the most recent Mexico ag. trade mission
- Met with 11 major site location-consulting firms, 22 corporate real estate executives and 40 commercial real estate professionals. We are putting Montana on the map!
- Developed a strategic, long-term recruitment initiative to support large and small Montana communities that cannot afford to individually develop professional marketing materials.
- Revising the BizMT web site to comply with international recruiting standards for content, functionality & access to required data. New site will launch in August, including:
  - Searchable commercial properties database
  - Montana Business Network. This network will facilitate Business-to-Business interaction by putting all Montana businesses online.
  - Local community profiles

## Office Accomplishments

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### Strategic Planning

We will be ready to release a draft of our final plan this fall — the culmination of almost a year's work involving...

- Strategic benchmarking of the plans & processes in other states.
- Research visits with state economic development professionals in 8 states surrounding Montana.
- Multiple discussions with 42 different Montana industry groups to identify priority areas.
- Meetings with 102 different economic development organizations in Montana, some more than a dozen times each.
- Prepared the Framework for Economic Development mid-way through the year to begin focusing the planning process.
- 15 different public half-day sessions around the state, including more than 1,000 people, for input on the Framework.
- Creating a board of advisors to provide oversight and advice for our work. This board has convened for half-day meetings every 4-6 weeks since February.
- 46 radio/TV/editorial board appearances to promote the need for change & build support for economic development.

### Clusters

Our clusters analysis...

- Benchmarked other cluster-based economic programs in other states with particular attention on how rural states have been successful with this approach
- Designed a study to meet Montana's needs.
- Awarded the Montana Cluster Study contract and launching the project to ensure completion by year-end

### Technology Transfer

Major initiatives include...

- Formation and leadership of a Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) team working to significantly increase awards in Montana.
- Meetings with NSSTF and NASA to bring more federal technology and related businesses to Montana.
- Developing a statewide IT asset inventory map.
- Working closely with technology transfer organizations in the MUS to evaluate better ways to commercialize R&D in the Montana.
- Participation in both Montana University System outreach tours in central/eastern Montana.

### Workforce Development

This past year's efforts at improving worker skills and training in Montana have been centered on four major initiatives...

- Providing leadership for the State Workforce Board, including the formation of an executive board and three sub-committees, to focus the board on making substantial improvements to Montana's workforce training programs
- Managing a study of our statewide workforce profile so that we can identify gaps in training/education and respond effectively to business' workforce related needs.
- Partnering with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education to evaluate the current structure of the State's 2-year system and make recommendations for change by November of this year.
- Developing (in partnership with the Workforce Board) legislation to create significantly greater resources for businesses to fund workforce training in the State.

